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AUTHOR	High, Clennis F.
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ABSTRACT

Texas college students must pass all three sections (reading, writing, and mathematics) of the state-mandated Texas Academic Skills Program (TASP) Test or must enroll in remedial course work. Over 98,000 TASP scores from 73 community, junior, and technical colleges for the academic year 1996-1997 were analyzed to ascertain if less-prepared students attend 2-year colleges than universities. Data were segregated into types of colleges (urban, suburban, and rural) and ethnicity (White, Black, Hispanic, and Other). The analyses clearly indicated that rural colleges performed far below the levels of both urban and suburban colleges. A most significant finding was that White students at rural colleges performed significantly below the level of those at urban and suburban colleges. Hispanic students at urban colleges had pass rates slightly higher than Hispanics at suburban colleges and significantly higher than those at rural colleges. Suburban colleges' pass rates were the highest among two-year colleges and nearly equaled the overall pass rate of all Texas institutions of higher education. The number of non-White students who took the test was negatively related to the percentage of students who passed the test, particularly at urban colleges. Half the schools in the study had pass rates of 40.3 percent or less. Pass rates among urban colleges varied more widely than those at suburban and rural colleges. Implications are discussed relative to proposed performance-based funding of Texas colleges, standardized testing in elementary and secondary schools, and ethnic and social disparities. Includes a description of the TASP test, outlines of essential elements in the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS), data tables, and newspaper clippings. (SAS)

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ED 423 087

An Analysis of the Disparity Between Urban, Suburban, and Rural Community, Junior and Technical Colleges on TASP Performance: Its Not Just a Minority Problem

Author:

Dr. Clennis F. High

Houston Community College

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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Abstract

An analysis of over 98,000 TASP scores from 73 Community, Junior, and Technical Colleges for academic year 1996-1997 was conducted. The statistics were taken from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board Publication entitled, "Texas Academic Skills Program Summary TASP Test Results Academic Year 1996-1997." The data were segregated into types of colleges (urban, suburban, and rural); by ethnicity (White, Black, Hispanic, and Other); and then analyzed to ascertain if there were any systematic patterns in regard to which groups were successful in passing all three sections of TASP for the 1996-97 academic year. The analyses clearly indicated that Rural Colleges performed far below the level of both urban and suburban colleges. A most significant finding was that even White students at Rural Colleges performed below the state average for Whites at Community and Technical colleges. These findings support a 1996 study, "The Texas Study", which reported similar findings.

Executive Summary Report

A study was conducted on TASP scores for over 98,000 students in Texas. The study included seventy-three Texas Community, Junior, and Technical Colleges with scores reported to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board. The study focused on students who passed all three sections of TASP for the 96-97 academic year. Some significant findings from that study include:

- Rural Colleges perform significantly below the level of Urban and Suburban Colleges.
- Although White students as a whole have better pass rates than most minorities, White students at Rural Colleges perform significantly below the level of those at Urban and Suburban Colleges and for the state as a whole.
- Hispanic students at Urban Colleges have pass rates slightly higher than Hispanics at Suburban Colleges and significantly higher than those at Rural Colleges.
- Suburban Colleges pass rates are tops among Community, Junior, and Technical Colleges and nearly equals the pass rate of all institutions combined (two-year and universities).
- There is a negative relationship between the number of Non-White students who take the test and the percent of students who pass the test, particularly at Urban Colleges.
- Half the schools in the study had pass rates of 40.3% or less.
- Pass rates among Urban Colleges vary more widely than those at Suburban and Rural Colleges.
- University pass rates are higher than those at two-year institutions.

RC 021635

An Analysis of the Disparity Between Urban, Suburban, and Rural Community, Junior and Technical Colleges on TASP Performance: Its Not Just a Minority Problem

Introduction

The problems we are experiencing in higher education in Texas are well documented. Many who have followed these problems of academic performance believe the problem to be more pronounced at Community, Junior, and Technical Colleges than in State Universities. This belief may be based on the fact that more less-prepared students seem to attend these two-year colleges than they do universities. Standardized test scores appear to support this belief.

In Texas, one measure used by most of these colleges is performance on the state mandated Texas Academic Skills Program Test (TASP). This test is required by all students who attend Texas colleges and universities, and have not been exempted by qualifying scores on other test (i.e. SAT, ACT, TAAS) or some other criteria. The test consists of three sections, which are reading, writing, and mathematics. If students do not pass all three sections, they must enroll in remedial course work. Some studies show that these remedial classes do little to enhance students' chances to pass TASP and other required test. For example, the "Texas Study" (1997) concluded that in many cases students who took no remedial courses performed better than does who did. Likewise, L.C. Gabe (1989) found students who needed, but did not take required remedial classes, did better than those who did take the classes.

Overall, there has been poor performance on this test. Generally, students from Community, Junior, Technical Colleges perform below the level of their counter parts at four year institutions, and Whites tend to out perform most minorities on the three sections of the test (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 1996). The state periodically publishes performance results, evaluation reports, or descriptive cohort studies, but these are normally limited in scope. One evaluation study done by Hunter Boylan on colleges and universities point out several problems. However, this study is said to have several flaws, and consequently did not describe the true scope of the problem. Researchers point out that Boylan did not indicate how urban, suburban, and rural colleges were determined. Second, he used a sample from a population of less than 200 colleges; the total population should have been used (Edwards, Thomas, Rosenfeld, Kewley, 1998). Lastly, after receiving a response rate of less than 70% (remember the population is only 103), he made no mention of the lack of responses from the more than 30% of Texas institutions. Was there something particular or different about this group that would have changed the overall outcome of the study? A sample from this group should have been collected for comparison. There were other methodological concerns.

In essence, there has been little outside research done as it relates to performance on TASP by Community and Junior Colleges specifically. One study which did focus on these colleges was the "Texas Study" which is cited above. This study, conducted in 1996, was probably the first broad-based study of its kind. The study included several interesting findings, one of the most interesting involved the stratification of performance by urban, suburban, and rural college students at Community and Junior Colleges. The college types were operationally defined in this study. This was the first time this issue was raised with supporting data. State records do not reflect a breakdown by urban, suburban,

or rural categories, this makes it difficult to conduct broad-based studies by state agencies.

This finding is very significant. If the three types of colleges are in fact performing at different levels, then the state does not have a problem with poor performance, it could have several problems. Consequently, any single initiative or program developed to address or resolve the performance problem is not likely to account for the differences in the three types of colleges. To put it another way, the problem will have not been clearly defined, which is one of the first steps in designing any program. This has not been addressed before, because state data is not collected in a manner which allows segregation by type of college (urban, suburban, and rural).

This study is largely an endeavor to help define the scope of the problem of poor performance by Community, Junior, and Technical colleges on the TASP test. It is also an extension of the previous "Texas Study", and seeks to determine if a significant difference exists between these three types of colleges. In this study, however, secondary analysis of state data will be used. Follow-up studies, using cohort groups, showed no difference between the types of schools, but it is highly likely that this was a result of cohort confounding. Cohort groups do not necessarily represent the general population on many key variables in the two-year college in Texas.

Significance

If there exists a clear distinct difference between the three types of colleges, then the problem of performance on TASP will have to be viewed from a different perspective. And consequently all factors known to be or thought to be contributors to the problem will need to be reevaluated. If the disparity between the three types

of colleges is excessive, then the methods needed to address problems within each type of college may need to be different.

More specifically, if Rural College performance is found to be significantly lower than that of the general population, special attention and consideration will be needed to help resolve their dilemma. This is such a concern, because the general population of community and Technical Colleges appear to be struggling in regard to TASP success. The collective reported performance for Community and Technical colleges can not be accepted as being accurate if a sub-group of that population is significantly below the norm. This means the problem is really worse than we think, and we are only being shown a portion of the big picture. We can not deal honestly and effectively with the on-going problem with TASP performance without first acknowledging that the problem has several faces, then addressing the specific concerns which create the total problem, and thereby resolving the total problem.

Further, if Suburban Colleges are performing superior to the other colleges, as at least one study has indicated, then we could possibly be in a serious "fix" if the state elects to go toward performance based funding. If the measure used is TASP performance it could turn into a series of legal and ethical confrontations. Most social scientist will agree that suburbia is where most middle-class people and above dwell. If these schools are allowed more funding, and Urban and Rural Schools less funding we are in for a stormy ride. I would not like to think that would or could happen. There has been many changes in the TASP program over the years, but the problem of poor performance is ever present. In spite of heavy criticism, the TASP test did not create the problem; it highlighted the problem. To describe the problem year after year is not going to help resolve it. It will be necessary to ascertain what factors contribute to the problem, and

then attack them. For too long we have played politics with students' potential to improve. We are either a part of the problem, or a part of the solution. This study is an effort to be part of the latter.

Research Question

This study is designed to address only one question, and the only objective of this endeavor is toward that end. As with the answering of any research question, it is expected that several other questions will arise. The question addressed in this study is: *Does the performance of White, Black, Hispanic, and Other students differ for the three types of Community, Junior and Technical Colleges of urban, suburban, and rural as it relates to passing the three sections of TASP?*

Population

The target population in this study included students from seventy- three Community, Junior, and Technical colleges in Texas. The units of analysis included test scores for 73 Community, Junior, and Technical colleges. A total of approximately 98,167 students was included. The seventy-three Community, Junior and Technical College scores were reported on the summary report published by the THECB for academic year 1996-79. This is a total of over 294,643 scores for the three sections of TASP . This included all Community, Junior and Technical Colleges on this report. One school, Southwest Institute for the Deaf was not included in the analyses, because it only reported a total of seven students with no subgroups. Some students scores were not included in this report. Those include, (1) students with unpaid TASP fees, (2) students who did not attend a public post secondary institution during the 96-97 academic year,

and (3) students who used the wrong institutional codes. It is not expected that these will significantly impact the results of these analyses.

In scientific investigation, it is important to clearly identify the population under study. Further, it is important for research consumers to realize that by doing this, the study has limited its own scope. Findings from a study can not (should not) be extended or inferred to other populations not included in that study. This rule applies to researcher, and others. If this study shows that differences exist between the three types of colleges on performance on TASP, then it has gone far to show population validity for these groups of colleges on *that* variable. The findings are theoretically not applicable to universities or colleges not included in this study.

Definition of Terms

Urban Colleges: Urban Colleges are generally located in densely populated urban areas. These colleges can be as different as the areas in which they are located. A common characteristic of these Urban Colleges is ready access to the cultural life of the city itself. Colleges categorized as urban in this study have identified themselves as being urban in the current edition of "The College Board's Guide to Two Year Colleges".

Suburban Colleges: Suburban Colleges can be quite varied. They are normally found in less populated areas than Urban Colleges and cover large geographic areas. These colleges are located near large cities, and campuses may range from fairly - new buildings to shopping malls. Colleges categorized as suburban in this study have identified themselves as being suburban in the current edition of "The College Board's Guide to Two Year Colleges"

Rural Colleges: Rural Colleges will normally be found some distance from cities or metropolitan areas. In most cases, students will rely almost entirely on the social and cultural events offered on campus. Colleges categorized as rural in this study have identified themselves as being rural in the current edition of "The College Board's Guide to Two Year Colleges".

Methodology and Procedures

Data from all reported schools in the state of Texas were used in this study. As a result there is no possibility of sampling error or other form of bias related to sample design. Population parameters rather than sample statistics were analyzed in this study. Test scores as reported on state records are assumed to be accurate, and the validity and reliability of the TASP test is addressed in the back section of this document. This test has been found to be acceptable as an assessment device.

Process

All seventy three schools used in the study were segregated by type (urban, suburban, and rural) based on aforementioned criteria, this resulted in twenty-eight Urban, twenty-three Suburban, and twenty-two Rural Schools. This is a total of seventy three. Next the percent of White, Black, Hispanic, and Other students who passed all three parts of TASP for the 96-97 academic year was tabulated for analyses. For purposes of analyses, all students who were not white were considered minorities. To determine the percent of minority students for each school who had scores reported, the percent of white students was calculated and subtracted from 100%. The data were entered into the GBSTAT statistical program, and a 7x73 data matrix was created.

The analyses were basically descriptive in nature. The researcher was interested in the total percent of successful students by college type and ethnicity, as well as variations between college types and ethnic groups. The variance, standard deviation, and coefficient of variation were used as indexes of variation for this data. To compare data distributions for normality and skewness, mean scores were compared to median points. And to ascertain if relationships existed among the data, the Pearson Correlation was computed and tested at the 5% level of significance. All data were taken from the state report. Because of minor decimal errors and at least one school reported in state data was not used in the study, there will be slight differences in some total scores. This will not effect the analyses.

This study seeks to display and describe how students performed on the 96-97 TASP test. In that light, it can theoretically be considered a descriptive study. As such, it makes no claims as to why the scores fall as they do. Moreover, it can not be utilized to determine what factors contribute to the situation. Though these factors may surface, it would take some form of regression, discriminate analysis, or other statistical procedures to describe the impact they have on performance. It can not be addressed in this study. However, the findings from this study can be used to show that a clear division of performance is evident based on what the data tell us. This information should prove helpful in addressing the problems we have seen with TASP performance. If nothing else, it will show that all things are not equal among the Community, Junior and Technical Colleges in the state as it relates to academic preparedness.

DATA ANALYSES

The data were segregated by college type (Urban, Suburban, and

Rural) and by ethnicity (White, Black, Hispanic, and Other). The number of Community, Junior, and Technical College students who passed all three sections of the TASP for the 96-97 academic year was ascertained for both categories (college type and ethnicity). This was done by dividing the number of successful students from each school by the total number of students who were tested. This gives the percent of students who were successful. When this analysis was done, it was found that Suburban Colleges out performed the others (44% , 41.3%, and 38.9% respectively). The only variation between the college types was that Hispanics at Urban Colleges seem to be doing better than those at Suburban Colleges (36.5% vs. 33.8%). However, both groups are performing above the reported state average for Hispanics of 32.2%. In all cases, Rural Colleges performed at levels below that of Urban and Suburban Schools and of the state as a whole. These findings are very consistent with those of the "Texas Study". As expected, White students generally out performed the minority students, but the data show that White students at Rural Colleges (44.8 vs. 49.7) are far below the state average for White students overall. It also indicates they perform significantly below whites at Urban and Suburban Schools (44.8 vs. 50 at Suburban Schools and 49.2 at Urban Schools.) In short, it can be stated that all ethnic groups at Rural Colleges are performing below the levels of their counterparts at the Urban and Suburban Colleges, according to state data.

The analysis for the group "Other" was handled differently from that for the White, Black, and Hispanic groups. This was necessary, because of two reasons. First, state data for this group is divided into two groups -Asians and Other. The latter group consist of several ethnicities. Secondly, several of the schools had no reported scores for these groups, and lastly, many of the colleges reported less than six students taking the test, but it is not clear whether this was five, four, three, two, or even one student.

To resolve this, the two groups were combined, and the reported percent that passed were added together and divided by two. This gave an average value for this group. This method still proved to show that these students at Rural Colleges performed below the other schools types. Table I below show the results of this analysis.

TABLE I

School Type x Ethnicity

Type college	Ethnicity of Students				
	White	Black	Hispanic	TOT	0ther
URBAN	49.2	26.6	36.5	41.3	35
SUBURBAN	50	28.3	33.8	44	38.6
RURAL	44.8	20.3	29	38.9	29.4
	(49.7)	**(24.9)**	**(32.2)**		

*Percentages in parentheses are state averages for the groups

The data show that Rural Colleges are performing below the state reported averages for Community, Junior, and Technical Colleges who passed all three sections of the TASP. This is true for all ethnic groups and for the colleges as a whole.

Index of relative standing

To create an index of relative standing (IRS) for the percent of students who passed for each of the seventy three colleges, quartile ranges were established. Each range begins at a particular percentile point (25th = 35.4%, median = 40.3%, and 75th = 44.9%). Schools with percents below 35.4 can be considered the lowest in the state; those with percents between 40.3 and 35.4 are moderate scorers; Those with passing percents between 40.3 and 44.9 above average; and schools with passing rates above 44.9 are high scoring schools. Half the colleges in this study had passing rates at or below 40.3%, and only 25% had pass rates at or above 44.9%.

Relationships

When the Pearson Correlation procedure was conducted several interesting relationships were noted. The most interesting was that between the percent of minority students who tested at a college and the percent of students who passed three sections of the test at the college ($r = -.45$, $p < .01$). The negative correlation indicates that as the number of minority students who tested increased, the passing percentage decreased. Though this coefficient is relatively small it indicates that 20% ($r^2 = .20$) of the variation in passing percentage can be attributed to the number of minority students who tested.

When the total percent who passed in each category was totaled and averaged, the results were the same. Moreover, it was found that Urban Colleges had the widest variation of passing percentages among colleges (SD = 9.5, coefficient of variation = 23). Table II on the following page highlights these findings.

TABLE II

Average % and variation within Categories

type college	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Coef. Var.
Urban	28	40.2	9.5	.23
Subur	23	43.8	6.5	.15
Rural	22	38.1	5.5	.14

* The Coefficient of Variation (SD/X) is an index of the relative dispersion of a distribution.

Findings and Conclusions

There is one major research question in this analysis. That question is: Does the performance of White, Black, Hispanic, and Other students differ for the three types of Community, Junior, and Technical Colleges of urban, suburban, and rural as it relates to passing the three sections of TASP? The data clearly show that there exists a clear performance pattern for the three types of Texas colleges. Suburban Colleges seem to be faring the best. Disturbingly, Rural Colleges as a whole are at the bottom of the performance strata. With all the problems that colleges are having with their students' passing the three parts of TASP, these colleges are in even worse shape. The fact that White students at these colleges are worse off than their counter-parts at Urban and Suburban Colleges, indicates that the problem transcends

ethnic bounds. However, it is clear that the negative correlation ($r = -.45$) shows that ethnicity is still a factor which impacts college performance on TASP. This is of particular interest as a recent report from the National Center for Educational Statistics shows that nearly half the minorities enrolled in higher education attend two-year colleges. These numbers are growing yearly.

The analyses give other valuable information. For instance, though Suburban Colleges appear to be at the top of the strata overall, Hispanics at Urban Colleges did better on passing the test. This is the only ethnic group for which this is true. Moreover, as urban colleges spread out they acquire some sub-populations that may be suburban. This may be why Urban Colleges have the largest amount of disparity. This can be problematic for those colleges, because it creates an overall population that is extremely heterogeneous, having several sub-populations within a college population. This causes problems with teaching styles, norming of test, needs of students and more. This alone can create a special concern for Urban Colleges.

The fact that the disparity exists in and of itself is not an answer to the problem. There are extraneous factors which influence these results. Students are not performing at these varying levels simply because they attend a particular type of college. Something has taken place in the environment from which they came. Some studies indicate that age, hometown population, career choice, and more effects retention rates at Rural Colleges, but not much is written regarding preparedness or lack of it for these colleges. This phenomena has not been addressed by Legislators or Educators, and is probably a confounding factor when attempting to establish TASP performance levels for Community, Junior, and Technical Colleges in the state. The published results are not a true picture, or at least not the whole picture.

There has been some discussion in the political arena about performance based funding. Right now, performance is mostly

based on TASP results. It will be interesting to see how this "political-academic" drama will play out. This study shows that there is no *initial equivalence* among these colleges. They are not starting out at the same level. Consequently, some colleges now need more help than others. Is it ethical or logical to give those who need the most the least? Strong remedial and advising programs require adequate funding. Funding is not the only requirement, but we all know that programs can not exist without it. Nor can they improve without funding.

Generally, schools with larger numbers of minorities taking the TASP have lower passing percentages, most of which are urban schools. It could be argued that these schools too need greater funding. Because of their lower "performance" will they in fact receive lower funding? That could be perceived as an indirect way of punishing schools with large minority enrollments.

Where does the problem start? When will it end? These are questions which we need to address very soon. Most instructors, counselors, and researchers know it doesn't start at the college level. It is widely known that students' have a tough problem just passing the TAAS, a test used in public schools in Texas to assess how grade school students are performing. The test starts at third grade and goes to exit level. Like the TASP dilemma, students are not doing well.

Although there are reports which show significant improvement in some districts, the truth is we are being given "*smoke, mirrors*, and *hocus pocus*". The reality is that even when the improvements take place, students are still behind. The TAAS test does not measure essential skills on grade level. For instance, the test given in the eight grade has 106 items, they include: 29 from grade eight; 37 from grade seven; 37 from grade six; and 3 from grade five. Moreover, the exit level test is almost identical to the eight grade test. ***There are no items above the eight grade on the exit test.*** Outlines for all seven test are included in the appendix.

There have been other problems. Recent reports have shown that social promotion still exists; students being taught one thing and being tested on another; and districts not reporting certain test scores. Articles highlighting these activities are in the appendix of this study. The problem of unprepared students is a *seamless* problem, it spans from elementary schools to college.

Given the new changes in TASP requirements, it will be interesting to see the 97-98 results. Students who have not shown that they can master tenth grade material are now required to take a test which measures entry level college material. We could witness an all time low on pass rates for TASP.

The problem we have requires more research to identify salient factors which result in such alarming findings as we have here. On every level, the situation will only get better when politics take a back seat to masterful teaching and skillful counseling and advisement. We as educators have a philosophical responsibility to to push toward that end.

INTRODUCTION

Background

The Texas Academic Skills Program (TASP®) is an instructional program designed to ensure that students attending public institutions of higher learning in Texas and students entering teacher preparation programs in Texas have the academic skills necessary to perform effectively in college-level work. Students not yet proficient in an academic area are required to participate in developmental education activities. The TASP includes a testing component designed to provide information about the reading, mathematics, and writing skills of students entering public colleges, universities, and educator preparation programs in public and private institutions. Students must pass the TASP Test before they receive an associate degree or certain certificates from two-year colleges or before they enroll in any upper-division courses where completion of such courses would give them sixty (60) or more college-level semester credit hours or the equivalent. Additional information about the TASP Test may be found in ***The Official TASP® Test Study Guide***, the ***TASP Faculty Manual***, **TASP Web site: www.tasp.nesinc.com,** and the ***TASP Test Registration Bulletin***.

The TASP Test

The TASP Test consists of three sections: reading, mathematics, and writing. Students may take one or more sections at a given test administration. All three sections must be passed for a student to fulfill the TASP testing requirement.

In each section, several items are field tested to gather statistical information about their performance. These items are not included in the calculation of examinee scores.

The multiple-choice items and writing assignments are based on the approved skills developed by Texas educators for the TASP.

Reading

The reading section consists of approximately 40 multiple-choice items based on reading passages. The passages are taken or adapted from college-level texts and other college-level reading materials.

Mathematics

The mathematics section consists of approximately 50 multiple-choice items covering four general areas: fundamental mathematics, algebra, geometry, and problem solving.

Writing

The writing section consists of a writing sample assignment, which requires the examinees to demonstrate their ability to communicate effectively in writing on a given topic, as well as approximately 40 multiple-choice items associated with written passages. The passages are adapted from college-level texts and other college-level reading materials.

Test Development and Validity

The TASP skills and item specifications were developed and approved by committees of Texas faculty in community colleges and universities. The skills were validated in surveys of Texas educators and

were finalized for testing by the test development committees. The committees then reviewed and validated test items. The test items were pilot tested in Texas and finalized by the committees based on pilot test results. Independent panels of Texas higher education faculty reviewed and revalidated the items and provided input to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board and the State Board of Education for use in setting passing standards. These boards are responsible by law for setting the passing standards.

Test Updating

Test development is an ongoing process. Since the original development of the test, additional new test items periodically have been developed, reviewed, and revised by the Content Advisory Committees and the Bias Review Panel.

TECHNICAL CHARACTERISTICS

Test and item characteristics are examined following each test administration as described below.

Reliability

Reliability concerns the extent to which a measure consistently produces the same result under similar conditions. For the TASP Test, an overall test reliability estimate is provided by the Kuder-Richardson index of item homogeneity (KR-20). This measure is reported in the range of 0.00 to 1.00. A higher number indicates a greater level of reliability.

Table 1 provides the ranges of test statistics for test forms administered September 1996–August 1997.

TABLE 1
TASP Test Statistics by Test Section (multiple-choice items)*

	Test Section		
Statistic	**Reading**	**Mathematics**	**Writing**
Number of scorable items	36	48	35
Mean percent correct	70.3–74.4	55.8–61.3	68.3–73.4
Mean raw score	25.3–26.8	26.8–29.4	23.9–25.7
Standard deviation	5.5–6.3	7.7–8.4	6.1–7.2
Standard error of measurement	2.3–2.5	3.0–3.1	2.3–2.4
KR-20 reliability	0.80–0.85	0.84–0.87	0.84–0.90

* Ranges across test forms administered September 1996–August 1997.

TAAS Third Grade has, out of 90 identified essential elements in specifications,

35 essential elements from Grade 3,
32 essential elements from Grade 2, and
23 essential elements from Grade 1.

TAAS Fourth Grade has, out of 89 identified essential elements in specifications,

29 essential elements from Grade 4,
32 essential elements from Grade 3, and
28 essential elements from Grade 2.

TAAS Fifth Grade has, out of 98 identified essential elements in specifications,

41 essential elements from Grade 5,
31 essential elements from Grade 4 and
26 essential elements from Grade 3.

TAAS Sixth Grade has, out of 108 identified essential elements in specifications,

34 essential elements from Grade 6,
42 essential elements from Grade 5, and
32 essential elements from Grade 4.

TAAS Seventh Grade has, out of 101 identified essential elements in specifications,

31 essential elements from Grade 7,
33 essential elements from Grade 6, and
37 essential elements from Grade 5.

TAAS Eighth Grade has, out of 106 identified essential elements in specifications,

29 essential elements from Grade 8,
37 essential elements from Grade 7,
37 essential elements from Grade 6, and
3 essential elements from Grade 5.

TAAS Exit level has, out of 109 identified essential elements in specifications,

31 essential elements from Grade 8,
39 essential elements from Grade 7,
35 essential elements from Grade 6, and
4 essential elements from Grade 5.

Passing All Three Sections of TASP Test
Academic Year 1996 - 1997

Community and Technical Colleges

Institution	Whites Number Tested	Whites Percent Passing	Blacks Number Tested	Blacks Percent Passing	Hispanics Number Tested	Hispanics Percent Passing	Asians Number Tested	Asians Percent Passing	Others Number Tested	Others Percent Passing	Totals Number Tested	Percent Pass Number Exempted	Percent Pass Without Exemptions
North Harris College	761	54.4%	260	30.4%	337	43.6%	355	31.5%	41	34.1%	1,754	272	43.7%
North Lake College	611	54.5%	114	30.7%	138	36.6%	174	31.0%	50	34.0%	1,087	133	44.9%
Northeast Texas Community College	485	43.7%	56	16.1%	26	19.2%	<6	0.0%	<6	50.0%	574	48	39.7%
Northwest Vista College	27	77.8%	9	66.7%	17	47.1%	<6	100.0%	<6	—	57	172	68.4%
Odessa College	636	51.3%	74	14.9%	407	36.9%	14	57.1%	10	50.0%	1,141	80	43.8%
Palo Alto College	473	52.0%	38	44.7%	3995	39.8%	17	47.1%	8	50.0%	1,531	226	43.6%
Panola College	464	45.7%	96	20.8%	17	35.3%	<6	33.3%	<6	0.0%	581	65	41.1%
Paris Junior College	575	46.8%	80	27.5%	10	30.0%	10	30.0%	22	31.8%	697	27	43.6%
Ranger College	219	42.9%	88	9.1%	56	17.9%	6	16.7%	<6	33.3%	372	33	30.6%
Richland College	1,414	53.5%	373	29.2%	347	39.5%	779	22.7%	120	35.8%	3,033	456	40.3%
San Antonio College	1,368	56.1%	106	41.5%	1,749	42.4%	176	30.7%	94	24.5%	3,493	605	46.6%
San Jacinto College Central	1,121	52.3%	97	26.8%	613	35.3%	233	26.6%	116	39.7%	2,080	199	43.3%
San Jacinto College North	309	46.0%	180	32.2%	247	33.2%	28	25.0%	17	23.5%	781	34	37.5%
San Jacinto College South	455	53.8%	87	33.3%	140	37.9%	103	36.0%	47	61.7%	832	148	47.1%
South Plains College	999	41.1%	132	14.4%	473	31.1%	12	41.7%	34	41.2%	1,650	77	36.1%
South Texas Community College	87	39.1%	<6	100.0%	2,207	24.3%	7	14.3%	<6	——	2,304	65	24.8%
Southwest Collegiate Institute for the Deaf	7	28.6%	<6	—	<6	—	<6	—	<6	—	7		28.6%
Southwest Texas Junior College	244	37.7%	<6	20.0%	1,080	24.9%	<6	0.0%	12	20.0%	1,344	18	27.0%
St. Philips College	335	45.4%	310	32.3%	675	34.1%	32	25.0%	6	66.7%	1,358	38	36.4%
Tarrant County Junior College Northeast	1,578	49.2%	2,101	26.7%	122	34.4%	207	23.2%	29	34.5%	2,037	278	44.3%
Tarrant County Junior College Northwest	695	48.6%	27	33.3%	172	37.8%	36	30.6%	9	44.4%	939	88	45.6%

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Passing All Three Sections of TASP Test
Academic Year 1996 - 1997

Community and Technical Colleges

Institution	Whites Number Tested	Whites Percent Passing	Blacks Number Tested	Blacks Percent Passing	Hispanics Number Tested	Hispanics Percent Passing	Asians Number Tested	Asians Percent Passing	Others Number Tested	Others Percent Passing	Totals Number Tested	Percent Pass Number Exempted	Percent Pass Without Exemptions
Alvin Community College	615	49.8%	40	30.0%	146	43.2%	19	42.1%	11	45.5%	831	93	47.3%
Amarillo College	914	60.1%	36	36.1%	201	48.3%	62	33.9%	18	27.8%	1,231	158	55.6%
Angelina College	809	39.6%	141	22.7%	66	34.8%	<6	25.0%	10	30.0%	1,030	93	36.8%
Austin Community College	2,801	62.8%	266	36.9%	837	47.1%	518	28.8%	199	46.2%	4,410	350	53.6%
Blinn College	1,761	53.0%	278	20.5%	246	46.3%	43	41.9%	124	27.4%	2,451	662	47.0%
Brazosport College	406	59.9%	42	40.5%	118	47.5%	20	40.0%	<6	20.0%	591	141	55.0%
Brookhaven College	726	58.8%	119	26.1%	214	40.7%	270	32.6%	66	48.5%	1,395	216	47.7%
Cedar Valley College	220	51.8%	234	25.6%	55	38.2%	<6	50.0%	<6	50.0%	513	54	38.4%
Central Texas College	708	54.8%	255	31.4%	172	46.5%	105	40.0%	118	22.9%	1,358	143	45.4%
Cisco Junior College	533	44.5%	83	19.3%	100	39.0%	<6	40.0%	8	62.5%	729	44	41.0%
Clarendon College	308	35.4%	22	22.7%	33	24.2%	<6	50.0%	<6	33.3%	370	1	33.8%
Coastal Bend College	302	50.3%	27	25.9%	535	26.2%	<6	20.0%	<6	75.0%	873	124	34.7%
College of the Mainland	468	52.4%	122	33.6%	126	30.2%	31	45.2%	6	66.7%	763	25	45.4%
Collin County Community College	1,654	54.7%	106	40.6%	160	40.6%	149	35.6%	57	52.6%	2,126		51.5%
Del Mar College	934	53.0%	46	41.3%	1,146	38.5%	40	35.0%	51	37.3%	2,217	200	44.6%
Eastfield College	939	49.0%	267	18.4%	267	36.0%	264	21.6%	31	25.8%	1,768	150	37.9%
El Centro College	150	40.0%	315	29.2%	143	31.6%	31	38.7%	14	35.7%	663	8	32.8%
El Paso Community College	487	47.4%	94	24.5%	3,701	29.2%	33	42.4%	80	32.5%	4,395		31.3%

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Schools exempting many students from taking TAAS test

By MELANIE MARSLEY
Houston Chronicle

A number of Houston area schools with high state ratings exempted significant percentages of students from taking the standardized test that is central to the ratings.

The exemptions, while legitimate under state guidelines, have drawn renewed scrutiny in a study commissioned by the Governor's Business Council

Exemptions school-by-school: Pages 3B-30A.

In the study, analysts found a wide variation in the number of students that elementary schools exempt from taking the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills because they are in special education classes or have "limited English proficiency." A similar study of middle school students is under way.

The analysis, done by education consultant Dorris Welch and University of Houston Professor Lawrence A. Toenjes, highlights the number of students at each school who took the test, the number who were tested but whose scores didn't count and the number who weren't tested at all.

The Texas Education Agency rates schools as exemplary, recognized, acceptable or low-performing, based largely on TAAS test score results. But the rating does not take into account the students exempted from taking the test or whose scores didn't count.

Welch said the percentages of exemptions vary widely, even among schools with similar student populations.

"The variation is so great as to be a concern," Welch said. "We see highs and lows all over the state."

For example, according to Welch's analysis, the Houston Independent School District tested 88 percent of its elementary students for accountability purposes last year while Spring Branch tested 55 percent. Largely on the basis of those test score results, both districts received an "acceptable" rating.

Yet, both districts have a lower percentage of disadvantaged and Spanish-speaking students than the Mission Consolidated Independent School District in the Rio Grande Valley, where the scores of 77 percent of the elementary students were figured into the district rating.

Although income factor in the accou low income student perform more poorly on standardized tests than more affluent groups.

The district is 96 percent Hispanic, and a large Hispanic population often corresponds to a high percentage of students with limited English proficiency. But Mission tested more of

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Exemptions

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students than many districts with smaller Hispanic populations, and received a "recognized" rating. If we really wanted to play the game and exempt 5 percent more, then we could easily be exemplary," Victor Benavides, director of assessment for the Mission schools. "But we'd rather not. I think there is more respect from the community if you are testing more kids even though your ratings are a little lower."

Houston businessman Charles Miller, who chairs the council's education committee, said the high exemption rates at some schools may not be entirely legitimate.

"It's not at a time when there is a push to include more students in the state's accountability system, he said. "It is important to at least take a look at the exemptions.

"The main thing is to put a spotlight on that," Miller said. "If there is a situation that doesn't have a good reason then we are going to want to put a spotlight on it. That's the goal."

The number of exemptions has been declining statewide. But some districts still too easy for schools to keep their ratings high by not testing students they know will do poorly. The determination is made largely by school based committees. Some districts may test exempted students for diagnostic purposes, but their scores don't count.

'If we really wanted to play the game and exempt 5 percent more, then we could easily be exemplary. But we'd rather not. I think there is more respect from the community if you are testing more kids even though your ratings are a little lower.'

Victor Benavides, director of assessment, Mission Consolidated Independent School District

In HISD, Susan Sclafani, chief of staff for educational programs, said district officials will be comparing how well schools perform on the TAAS to how well they do on district-administered standardized tests that do not allow exemptions.

"Our concern is if this is a decision made in the best interest of children, then we need to provide some alternatives to them," she said. "If it's simply to inflate accountability levels and test scores, it's a problem."

State guidelines require schools to give exempted students a state-approved alternative assessment, which in HISD's case is the Stanford Achievement Test or, in Spanish, the Aprenda. But the scores are not officially reported like TAAS scores, and they are not taken into account when the schools are rated.

More than a third of the students at two "exemplary" campuses – Scott and Isaacs elementary schools in HISD – were not tested on the TAAS last year, the report shows.

Scott exempted 64 percent of its students from taking the TAAS. Another 4 percent took the TAAS, but their scores did not count because the students were in special education or were new to the district.

Principal Artice Hodgeman said most of the students who were exempted at Scott have limited proficiency in English. According to state guidelines, students can be exempted for up to three years if they aren't proficient in English. Although the state has developed a Spanish version of the TAAS for third- and fourth-graders, Hodgeman said the Scott students were not tested in Spanish because they weren't taught in Spanish.

"We follow the guidelines," Hodgeman said, "and they are quite clear."

Isaacs, also an "exemplary" school, did not test 34 percent of its students. Principal Leon Pettis Jr. said most had limited English proficiency. Another 17 percent were tested, but their scores were not figured into the school's accountability rating.

Certainly, Isaacs and Scott in HISD are not the only schools to exempt large percentages of students, particularly if they are not yet proficient in English.

Spring Branch Elementary, in the Spring Branch Independent School District, received a "recognized" rating last year after exempting 75 percent of its mostly Hispanic students from the state's accountability system. Fifty-five percent of the school's students weren't given the TAAS, and 20 percent took the test but their scores did not count.

Rudy Anderson, facilitator for student assessment in the Spring Branch school district, said it's only fair to exempt students who haven't mastered the language.

"If I just put myself in a child's place, I don't think it's fair to assess children in a language they do not speak or understand," said Anderson. "I think they should be assessed somehow, and we do that."

But others worry that unless all children's test scores are part of a school's accountability rating, too many will be allowed to slip through the cracks.

Noelia Garza, director of HISD's bilingual education, said she would support eliminating all exemptions except for new arrivals from foreign countries. Schools exempt students from the high-stakes test because the guidelines permit it, she said.

"All these issues with too many exemptions, too many this, too many that, well it's allowed. The system allows it, and every district is using that," she said. "If they would eliminate it at the state level, we wouldn't have any issues with this. We probably wouldn't have as many exemplary schools, but we would have a whole lot more focus on instruction for all these kids."

'Our concern is if this is a decision made in the best interest of children, then we need to provide some alternatives to them. If it's simply to inflate accountability levels and test scores, it's a problem.'

Susan Sclafani, HISD's chief of staff for educational programs

Indeed, the state is making changes in the law to prevent so many exemptions.

The state Legislature voted last year to include special education students' test scores in calculating the accountability ratings. The scores will be included beginning in the spring of 1999, and the state is required to develop other assessments for children whose disabilities prevent them from taking the TAAS.

State Rep. Scott Hochberg, D-Houston, who authored the legislation, said he heard testimony that schools were boosting their special education count just before the TAAS was administered.

"I believe there are schools who have over identified special education kids in order to get big exemptions," said Hochberg.

Also, the state is phasing in a Spanish version of the TAAS that in 1999 will become a part of the school accountability rating. The test was first given to third- and fourth-graders last year.

At the same time, the state is developing a new test called a Reading Proficiency Test in English that will be used to measure the progress of students who are not yet fluent in English.

State Rep. Domingo Garcia, D-Dallas, said he plans to reintroduce in 1999 a measure that would end all exemptions for students with limited English proficiency. The bill stalled in the 1997 legislative session.

Meanwhile, Winick, the education consultant, said it's valuable for the public to keep close tabs on exemptions when considering how schools are rated.

"It's just a little more sunlight on the school system," Winick said.

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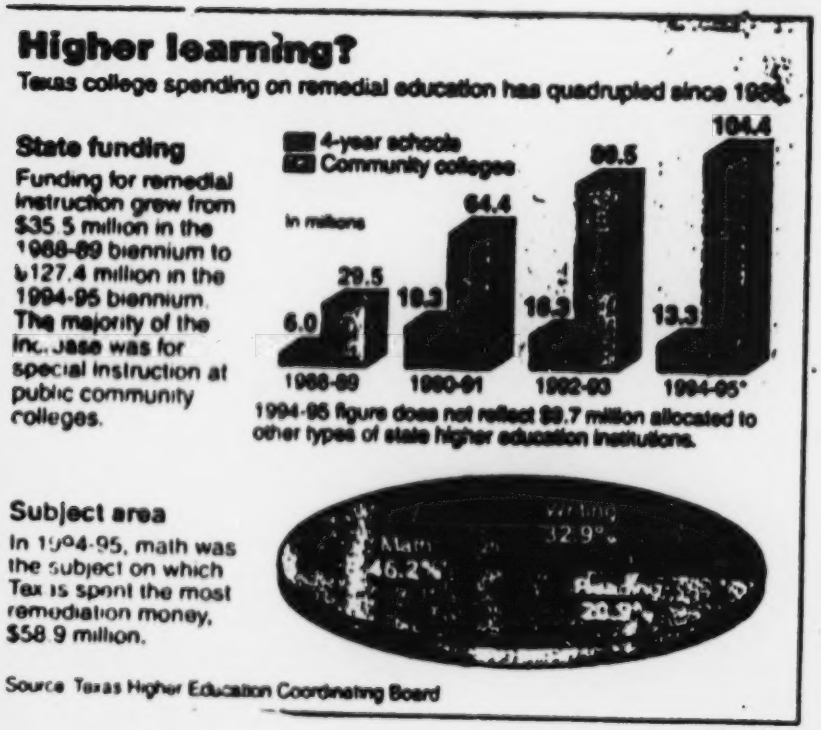

Lowering higher ed

Remedial education draining budgets

By TODD ACKERMAN
Houston Chronicle

Texas college spending on remedial education has nearly quadrupled in the past six years, prompting new concern about just how much students are learning in public schools.

State funding to teach college and university students basic reading, writing and math skills exceeded $127 million in 1994-95, up from $35 million in 1988-89, according to a new report by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board.

"This shows taxpayers are having to pay twice to teach kids basic skills," says Nancy Atlas, chair of the Coordinating Board. "And underfunded colleges are being stretched even thinner."

The increased remedial course work is stirring a debate that has even made its way into the comic strip *Doonesbury*. Critics say it is an indictment of the public schools, defenders say such claims are self-serving and no one thinks the situation will improve any time soon.

It is happening across the country. No national statistics are readily available, but experts say that spending on college remedial education has increased twofold to fourfold since the 1980s, an era marked by the diversity of people seeking

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Studies find social promotions widespread

By KATHY WALT
and MELANIE MARKLEY
Houston Chronicle

Texas teachers often are pressured to inflate grades and promote failing students to the next grade, according to results of two studies on grading practices released Monday.

The studies were conducted last fall in Houston by the Houston Federation of Teachers and statewide by the Texas Federation of Teachers

Teachers pressured to pass students

"There's an unbelievable amount of pressure on teachers to pass the students," said Nelson Brown, a ninth-grade teacher at Sam Houston High School, where he has failed 60 percent of teen-agers in his classes. "The message is, 'If you have a lot of failures, there's something wrong with you.'"

Brown said one-third of freshmen at his inner-city Houston school were "placed in the ninth grade" – which he said is a euphemism there for "social promotion" – and another third are repeating their first year. With that student body profile, he said, large numbers of failures should be expected.

Yet one of his colleagues will not give a grade of less than 50, even if students do not turn in their assignments, Brown said. Another gives students a grade of 70 – the minimum passing mark – just for writing their names on their papers.

Of the 2,682 Houston teachers who responded to the HFT mail survey, most said they were pressured to inflate grades and more than two-thirds said students in their school were promoted despite failing grades. HFT mailed the survey to 13,000 Houston teachers.

Statewide – where 2,122 of the 8,000 TFT teachers who received questionnaires responded – the results are similar; 60 percent said they had been pressured to inflate grades.

Also, 68 percent of Houston teachers who responded said students

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Promotion

Continued from Page 1A.

were promoted even though they had not mastered the subject, and 57 percent said there was no remedial program available on their campus to help failing students.

"The results of that survey confirm what many of us have long suspected," said TFT President John Cole said. "School administrators override teachers' grades and simply promote students from one grade to the next even though those students have failed their classes. It is time to call a halt to this deplorable practice" known as social promotion.

Gov. George W. Bush, meanwhile, said he will address the issue in a policy speech on illiteracy next week.

"We should never graduate an illiterate child in Texas, and if we're doing so now, we must address it early in the child's cycle," Bush said. "I am absolutely convinced that we can teach children to read in Texas, and much of what they're referring to is the promotion of children who cannot read. Yes, I think it's a problem, and, yes, I want it addressed."

HISD last year promoted – or placed into the next grade – nearly 13,000 students who did not pass their coursework but already had been retained the maximum time allowed by law, said spokeswoman Sandy Rivera.

At the same time, the district retained 7,000 students in kindergarten through eighth grade, she said. And in high school, 9,400 students failed to advance to the next grade. The district has an enrollment of 207,000 students.

HFT President Gayle Fulton said a staggering 90 percent of Houston teachers reported having students in class who began the year academically unprepared.

"If I've got a child in 12th-grade level, I might as well not even issue that child a textbook because that book is written on grade level and at best, he can look at the pictures," she said.

Although the Texas Education Agency has no reliable count on the number of students who are socially promoted, 77,000 students last school year were "placed at the next grade level," said TEA spokesperson Debbie Graves Ratchik. Those 77,000 could include students who were so advanced that they skipped a year in school, she said.

Graves said Texas schools retained 172,000 children at all grade levels in the 1993-94 school year, the last year for which those figures are available.

In contrast, Cole said, TFT [illegible] states that more than 150,000 of [illegible] students are [illegible] grade level each [illegible] grade.

"If a child cannot read when he or she enters second grade, that child is bound to fall further behind," Cole said. "If a student reaches middle school unable to read, the efforts to remediate are vastly [illegible]."

Social promotion was banned in 1994, Cole added, but administrators have ignored the law "because it is easier to promote the student than it is to deal seriously with that student's learning problem."

Pulton said HFT will join the state teachers' organization in pushing for legislation that bans social promotion, requires all children to be able to read before they leave third grade, provides intensive intervention for failing students and restores a teacher's authority in grading and in determining if a child is retained or promoted.

Chronicle reporter Ross Ramsey contributed to the story.

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